

SUMMARY

Camp Butner History – On Duty for the Nation, 1942-1947. On February 12, 1942, the War Department issued an order for the acquisition of land near Durham, North Carolina, to be used as a training and cantonment facility during World War II. Eventually, the Army acquired 40,384.39 acres. As it turned out, Camp Butner was only used for training exercises during a short span of 18 months, from early 1942 to June of 1943. The units who trained at Camp Butner included the 78th, or “Lightning” division, the 89th, and 4th Infantry as well as some artillery and engineering units. The installation was also used as a redeployment center, and was home to one of the Army’s largest general and convalescent hospitals. The site included facilities for ammunition storage as well. Finally, Camp Butner also housed prisoners of war starting in September 1943.

A contemporary publication shows a very active camp life, including the vibrant social life soldiers managed to enjoy to some extent, even as they trained for tough missions overseas.

The training included live fire exercises on about 15 ammunition ranges. One range encompassed 23,000 acres. Other ranges included a grenade range, a 1,000-inch range used for training with pistols, a gas chamber, and a flame-thrower training pad. Artillery rounds were fired toward an area known as the “mock German village.”

In 1947, the War Department decided to close the installation.

The hospital, along with 10,000 acres of land, was transferred to the State of North Carolina for use as a mental hospital, becoming the John Umstead Hospital. The state also acquired 1,600 acres for other uses, primarily agricultural development. A further 4,750 acres became the North Carolina National Guard Training Center.



78th Division



89th Division



35th Division



4th Infantry Division